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RHMCSII/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUZFMXI/CDR USTRANSCOM INTEL CELL SCOTT AFB IL
RUEPNGA/CDRNGIC CHARLOTTESVILLE VA
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RUEPTRX/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC
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SUBJ: (U) ARTICLE VIEWS IDF'S INTELLIGENCE UNIT 8200, NOTES
Graduates' Prominence, 'Success' in Civilian Life

SOURCE: Tel Aviv Haaretz.com in English 17 Apr 14 (U)

TEXT:

[(U) Article by Inbal Orpaz: "The Army's MIT, CalTech and Harvard
All Rolled Into One"]

[INTERNET]

[OSC Transcribed Text]

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A Supreme Court justice, the director general of the Finance Ministry, an internationally successful author, the CEO of one of Israel's largest accountancy firms, the Economy Ministry's chief scientist, a leading comic and the chairman of the Knesset coalition entered an elevator. This is not the beginning of a joke. It's a fact.

The elevator is known as Intelligence Unit 8200 of the Israel Defense Forces. From all appearances, it's one of the surest ways to rise into the stratosphere of the Israeli labor market. And we haven't even mentioned dozens of graduates of the unit who have established some of the leading technology companies in the country and hold senior positions in high-tech.

Thanks to intensive marketing, 8200 -- the largest unit in the IDF, which engages in intelligence activity, partly through the use of advanced technology and languages, has become a prestigious and well-known brand internationally. The establishment of firms such as the software technologies company Check Point and dozens of other

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communications and information-security firms is attributable to the technological base of knowledge accumulated in the unit. Over the years, service in the unit has become more than just another item on its graduates' resumes. It is now an admission ticket to tremendous opportunities, most notably for those who were involved with technology during their service.

The selection process for the unit is long and arduous, and ensures that only the most talented make it. That is not in dispute. The only question that remains open is whether the IDF, and especially its technological units, continue to constitute a melting pot or have they become an exclusive club for the elites. Furthermore, should IDF units even fulfill a social function, or worry only about filling their ranks with the best soldiers that can be recruited?

Former members of the unit and observers from the side pose the chicken-and-egg question: Do the unit's graduates succeed in civilian life because of their service in 8200, or are they chosen for the unit because they bear the potential for success?

For Gilad Adin, the owner of a media company and former CEO and chief editor of Channel 10 News, and before that a base commander in Unit 8200, the answer is clear: "Because 8200 has the right of first choice in the army -- apart from candidates for pilot training -- it takes those who possess high potential from the outset. It follows that people don't necessarily succeed afterward because they served in 8200.

Not Everyone Stays a Techie

It's true that those who serve in the unit acquire tools in the high-tech realm, but why do some of the graduates become judges, academics, financial experts or CEOs? They are people whom the IDF 'discovered,' so to speak, when they were just 17. The army discerned a very high potential in them, including analytical capability, rapid data-processing ability and quick decision-making ability. If an intelligence unit identifies the people with high potential in high school, it's obvious that they have a good chance of going far."

Still, to Economy Ministry Chief Scientist Avi Hasson it's clear that service in the unit went a long way toward shaping his character. "From almost every aspect -- patterns of work, acquired skills and social connections -- much of what I am today is due to those five meaningful years," says Hasson, who in the past was involved in Gemini, a venture capital fund, and is still involved in locating candidates for a classified task in Unit 8200.

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"The people I served with in the army were among the first to enter high-tech," he says. "In the case of certain tasks in the unit, your everyday work is such that it's not so complicated to set up a firm in the civilian market afterward, because you're used to solving complex problems with limited personnel, in a short time and amid great responsibility. When it comes to managing a start-up, Unit 8200 is a fantastic school. It's different, for example, from the culture you find in the air force, of debriefing, processing or management. The unit encourages independent thought. It's something that was adopted later by many companies, a little like the culture in Google, in which good ideas can come from anywhere."

Moreover, Hasson explains, people take from the unit patterns of work, leadership and the ability to cope under conditions of pressure and uncertainty. "It's useful not only for people who go into high-tech, but also for physicians and members of other professions in which you need to process a great deal of information in a short time, take responsibility and make decisions while leading a team. The unit gives you the feeling that you can do almost anything in many different realms of content."

Adin agrees that his service in the unit exercised a dramatic effect on his career. "Without a doubt, service in 8200 opens doors," he says. "I never imagined that I would become the CEO of a news and media company, but the truth is that service in an intelligence unit prepared me optimally for work in a news company. There are many areas of overlap between the two systems: a news company, too, collects open and covert intelligence material, makes use of technological and humint (human intelligence collection), analyzes and distills information, and makes decisions about what gets disseminated to who. People who are engaged in intelligence work are exposed from an early age to a great deal of information, make decisions under conditions of pressure and are responsible for people's lives."

These capabilities are also required in other areas, Adin notes: "A politician or a CEO also has to use people all the time to collect information, analyze it and process it for making decisions. The work crosses every relevant area."

Recruiting Ground

Over the years, the connections have intensified between Unit 8200 and the high-tech industry, which eagerly gobbles up its graduates. It's hard to estimate the amount of royalties the IDF would get if it

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were to demand payment for the intellectual property that is created in its technological units, but it would certainly be considerable.

However, in recent years it appears that the human flow is not only from the army into Israel's advanced technology firms -- the influence is mutual. For one thing, high-tech working methods have been introduced into Unit 8200. The unit holds hackathons (marathon sessions of programmers) in order to encourage innovativeness and initiative among its soldiers. And senior figures from the Israeli high-tech industry are in ongoing touch with the unit, not only as reservists but also in meetings in which the opportunities available in post-army civilian life are presented -- a privilege granted to few in the current cruel labor market.

It goes without saying that the unit's graduates in the technological realms are snapped up by companies after their discharge, partly because of their relevant experience, but also in no small measure thanks to social networking. In the high-tech industry, where personnel are recruited largely by means of the "buddy system," one's army buddies are the pipeline to the next well-paying job. This is obviously invaluable for those who served in the unit, as it shapes their career and ensures smooth high-salaried passage into civilian life.

The unit's graduates can also look forward to a soft landing in the realm of entrepreneurship. For example, EISP 8200, a program for startups that was founded by an association of the unit's former members (though it's also open to candidates who did not serve in the unit), holds annual meetings along with other activities. It's one more mechanism that helps the graduates leverage their experience and connections.

Passing Over the Periphery

Regrettably, not everyone can avail himself of the wonderful opportunities available to those who serve in Unit 8200. Data provided by the IDF at the request of TheMarker a year ago show that the percentage of those from Tel Aviv and the center of the country who serve in technological roles in 8200 or in the IDF's computer and information systems center is significantly greater than their proportion in the armed services. In other words, soldiers from the north and south of the country are underrepresented in the IDF's technological units compared to their percentage of the population. So if you're born in the center of Israel you have a higher chance of serving in prestigious technological roles in the army then getting into the high-tech industry and enjoying a higher salary level than

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those who live in outlying areas.

According to statistics provided by the IDF, whereas 43 percent of the soldiers (referring to men only) who serve in the IDF live in Tel Aviv and the center, they constitute 54 percent of the army's programmers and members of the officer candidate academic studies program -- a disparity of 11 percent, or 25 percent more than their relative share in the number of IDF recruits. In contrast, inhabitants of the geographical periphery are underrepresented in technological roles. About 15 percent of IDF soldiers live in the north, but only 10 percent are programmers or in the officer candidate academic studies program -- underrepresentation of 5 percent. As for the south of the country, where 17 percent of the soldiers live, there is 4 percent underrepresentation. Soldiers from Jerusalem are also underrepresented from this perspective, though more moderately.

"In large measure, the unit works with a given pool of high-school students," Hasson says. "If you see a geographic concentration in 8200 of soldiers from certain areas of the country, that reflects primarily the input of the education system. A large portion of the candidate-search system works through the schools. There is no special preference for a graduate of Leyada, say (referring to the semi-private Hebrew University High School), but it's more than likely that a Leyada graduate will be familiar with the unit and its tracks as he has a brother, friend or cousin already serving in it."

Still, there is one group that has succeeded in entering the ranks of 8200 and making the leap straight into high-tech afterward: immigrants from the former Soviet Union. This group, many of whom arrived in Israel in the 1990s with a technological background or, in the second generation, were encouraged by their parents to choose scientific-technological tracks in high school, were recruited to technical tasks in the army and became an integral part of Unit 8200. The Russian speakers are an example of a group that demonstrated social mobility and thereby bridged the origin gap, thanks to their army service.

Reducing Social Disparities

The geographical dispersion of the developers in the IDF, those destined to become the next high-tech generation, raises the question of whether Unit 8200 should undertake as one of its missions to help reduce social disparities and engage in affirmative action by recruiting more youngsters from the geographical and social periphery.

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Sources in the Intelligence Corps say that in recent years proactive steps have been taken to change the mix of those recruited for the coveted roles. One example is Project Atidim, which was launched in 1999 to encourage outstanding high-school graduates from the periphery to become part of the officer candidate academic studies program. There is also Project Kedem, which prepares high-school students in the outlying areas to serve in the IDF's computer center.

"Every year we see more people entering the narrow circle of 8200 from different social strata in the periphery and from other population sectors, mainly the national-religious population," observes Hasson, the chief scientist, who is involved in the classification process in the unit. "The situation changed for many reasons, one of which is quantitative -- there is an effort to get as many candidates as possible into the initial cut. As a result, more circles are entering and, naturally, the circles expand."

[Description of Source: Tel Aviv Haaretz.com in English -- Website of English-language version of Ha'aretz, left-of-center, independent daily of record; URL: <http://www.haaretz.com/>]

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